

Book Review of Jonathan Brown's book "Misquoting Muhammed" (ﷺ)

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"Misquoting Muhammed" (Sallallahu alaihi wa sallam ﷺ) is a book by the Western academic Jonathan Brown that follows on from a series of books by him on aspects relating to hadith and the Noble Prophet (ﷺ). Brown has done a great service to Muslims and non-Muslims by highlighting in an academic and easily understandable way, the importance of hadith to understand Islam and Muslims, given some explanations about what hadith science is, the various contributions made by hadith scholars, and presented some of the traditionalist and classical epistemological views in relation to hadith and hadith interpretation.

In this book, Brown has done a good job in refuting the interpretations of the violent extremists in regards to hadiths and rightly encourages Muslims to ensure that they're not quoting forged hadiths.

He has also devoted a few pages to provide good refutations to the "Qur'an only" movement by arguing that the same methodology they use to reject hadiths, can be applied to reject the other Islamic sciences such as tafsir, linguistics (through which one knows what the Qur'anic words mean) because generally the Islamic sciences rely on the tradition of isnad. This would mean that the Qur'an could not be understood, and in fact would be liable to even more misinterpretations, if we abandon hadiths as a whole. He also discussed that hadiths and scholars actually provide crucial explanations to the Qur'an, such as limiting the cutting of hands when conditions of a minimum amount are fulfilled, or about how to actually pray.

Despite the above benefits of the books, there are a number of other major errors, some of which are highlighted below. If one is sincere and unafraid of the truth, then the following read is of beneficial:

1) Attack on the Sahaba

Brown has not applied academic rigour when it comes to his personal beliefs in terms of hating Sayyidina Mu'awiya, the one who was appointed by the Prophet (ﷺ) as the writer of revelation. He said "Mu'awiya himself encouraged his followers to forge Hadiths" (p 22). When I spoke to Brown directly on this (in his SOAS talk on 29/02/2016), he said that he had "no doubt about it, that the Bukhari or Muslim mention that Muawiyah encouraged cursing Ali and that it mentioned that Muawiyah was a liar, which shows he was a dishonest man". However none of these evidences are found in the Bukhari or Muslim¹.

As for his references in the "Misquoting" book, they are from Kitab al-Ahdath attributed to al-Mada'ini (d 235 AH) and al-Risala by Ahmad al-Miswari, the latter is definitely a Shia source (shias curse and hate Mu'awiya). Al-Mada'ini lived over 100 after Mu'awiya and al-Miswari lived a long time afterwards also. Nevertheless no sound chain is known for their reports and Brown actually quoted from al-Miswari who apparently quotes from al-Mada'ini. Since al-Mada'ini's work is extinct, Brown has completely relied on an extremely biased Shia source for the citation and there is no way

¹ Instead Jonathan seems to have misquoted the incident mentioned in

<http://sunnah.org/wp/2008/07/18/muawiyah-and-abusing-imam-ali-as/>

to determine what al-Mada'ini actually said (note that Shias often misquote Sunni sources even when the works exist²). Even if al-Miswari actually quoted from Kitab al-Ahdath, we don't know if the copy was the authentic copy of al-Mada'ini or was fabricated or tampered.

Considering that it is well known that many reports against Mu'awiya were forged by Shias and Shias ritualistically curse him, I expected appropriate scepticism by Brown.

On the other hand the report about Mu'awiya cursing Ali is actually without a sound chain³ and is circulated amongst the Shia (in fact they generally have no chain/isnad).

Shaykh Dr Gibril Haddad rightly mentioned "As for whatever transgression is attributed to Mu'awiya, Allah be well-pleased with him, the Prophet himself (upon him blessings and peace) declared that it does not matter at all, since he said that those who fought at Badr and Hunayn are in Paradise, and Mu'awiya fought at Hunayn."⁴ On the other hand, various sahaba specifically praised Mu'awiya, such as Ibn Abbas calling him a faqih⁵ whilst Bukhari, Muslim, Malik and many other leading Hadith masters included Mu'awiya as a narrator in their collections.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said: "None of you should come to me with anything (negative) about any of my Companions for I do not want to go out to you except with a clear heart."⁶

The Qur'an says "Those are a people who have passed away. Theirs is that which they earned, and yours is that which ye earn. And ye will not be asked of what they used to do." (2:134)

Based on the principles and sources that Brown uses to attack Mu'awiya, many of the other leading sahaba would be attacked (such as Sayyida A'isha, Sayyiduna Umar ibn al-Khattab), which suggests that Brown's approach is not consistent. Malik⁷ and Ibn Taymiyya⁸ deemed it a punishable crime to believe that Mu'awiya was misguided or to curse him whilst Ahmed said that such people should be "abandoned"⁹, which refutes Brown's claim of following the Hanbali madhab.

2) Women leading men in prayer

Brown briefly gives the arguments of the Sunni scholars against women leading men in prayer (for fardh salats in public) and then provides detailed refutations of each of the Sunni arguments. Whilst he does not give his personal opinion, the reader is left in no doubt about what is the "correct opinion".

He defends the Hadith of Umm Waraqa as authentic despite many leading hadith scholars declaring it weak. Brown does not address the major weaknesses of this hadith, including its numerous divergent and contradictory versions, the unknown narrators, and the fact that the entire hadith goes through only one narrator Walid ibn Abdillah ibn Jumay (thus it is a purely solitary hadith which can't stand against the weight of ijma and other stronger evidences and hadiths).

² See example in https://www.abc.se/~m9783/k/vt2-gfh_e.html and http://www.livingislam.org/fiqhi/fiqha_e94.html#3

³ Bidaya wa Nihaya by Ibn Kathir

⁴ <http://eshaykh.com/doctrine/sahabi-muawiya/>

⁵ Sahih Bukhari

⁶ Narrated by Abu Dawud, al-Tirmidhi, and Ahmad. This is also supported by the Hadiths in the sahihayn about not cursing the sahaba such as "Do not insult my companions, for, by Allah, if any of you gave gold the extent of Mount Uhud in charity, you would not reach even a handful or even half a handful [of what they did]".

⁷ Al-Shifa by Qadi Iyad

⁸ Majmu' al-Fatawa by Ibn Taymiyya

⁹ Al-Sunnah by al-Khallal

Hakim said about this hadith “This is a strange practice. I do not know of a connected hadith on the subject besides this” and “It would have been better if Muslim did not transmit his (hadiths).”. Despite this, Brown claims that Hakim deemed the report authentic (another example of Brown failing to understand hadith science and misquoting).

Ibn Hibban further said about Walid “He was of those who were isolated (in their reports) from firm reporters (in narrating) what does not resemble the narration of trustworthy men. When that is excessive from him, adducing evidence from him is nullified.” Whilst al-Uqayli said in his book on weak narrators “There is inconsistency in his hadith.” Inconsistency is objective evidence of a narrator’s weakness and is objectively shown by the fact that this hadith has variant and divergent versions from Walid (such as some not mentioning Imamate or an Azan, or mixing up narrators).

As for those from whom Walid narrates from, all of them are either unknown (in person or reliability). The accepted and soundest position in hadith scholarship is that the people who are unknown, are not deemed reliable in hadith. This, as well as the detailed analysis by Shu’ayb Arna’ut, concluded that the hadith of Umm Waraqa is weak and no evidence¹⁰.

If the hadith was authentic and some major scholars had allowed women leading men, then such a practice would have been done or known during the time of the Salaf, who were strict followers of the Prophet (ﷺ). The fact that Hakim found the practice strange, indicates that he had never come across it. This is supported by Umm Waraqa living in Madinah, yet none of the scholars of Madinah allowed women leading men (from the time of Malik or before).¹¹

The hadith also gives no unambiguous indication that men were led by a woman. In fact the only version that mentions gender, clearly states women being led by Umm Waraqa.

Brown then tries to bolster his position by attributing the permissibility of women leading men (in any condition) to Tabari, Abu Thawri, Muzani and the Sufi Ibn Arabi. He further justified this by claiming that Tabari had a flourishing madhab and giving his credentials. However this only shows the inconsistent methodology of Brown because he does not quote Tabari’s tafsir’s interpretation on hitting women (his view won’t please feminists but does Brown deem them as valid followable views now too?) nor Tabari’s other odd and isolated views which no Muslim would accept. Furthermore there is no isnad for attributing the positions to Tabari or Abu Thawr, hence we can’t declare that there is any reasonable proof that they held this position or what their conditions were (e.g. that women can only lead in the home when the men are unqualified).

As for Muzani, the latter said “The prayer of anyone praying behind someone in a state of major ritual impurity, a woman, an insane person, or a disbeliever is acceptably conveyed if he is unaware of his/her [the ‘s] state.”¹² Zaid Shakir said “From this we can infer that the prayer of the follower in all of these scenarios is unacceptable if he knows of the ‘s state. This would include his prayer behind a woman. As for the opinion that al-Muzani actually endorsed female prayer leadership, it has not reached us in any extant document.”¹³

As for Ibn Arabi, he doesn’t quote the latter’s statement in the futuhat that women are deficient in the intellect and religion (section on whether it is obligatory for women to pray in congregation). Again this shows Brown being inconsistent in quoting and only quoting what supports him. It is also

¹⁰ A detailed analysis of the hadith is given by Zameelur Rahman in <http://islamqa.org/hanafi/askimam/80384>

¹¹ Sunan of Bayhaqi. See his discussion on the evidences and the view of the seven jurists of Madinah.

¹² Mukhtasar of Muzani

¹³ https://www.newislamicdirections.com/nid/articles/female_prayer_leadership_revisited

known that many of Ibn Arabi's works have been tampered with so we are not sure that Ibn Arabi actually held this position. In fact suggestions of tamperings are found on this issue because it is against Ibn Arabi's methodology and the reasoning he gave for his position contradicts his other reasoning elsewhere in the text (where he is explicit that matters relating to the prayer have to be proven from the Prophet, otherwise they're not allowed)¹⁴. The other point is that Ibn Arabi does not state that women can lead in any situation. Due to the lack of transmission of his fiqh through living scholars and detailed manuals on fiqh, we don't know what his conditions were for women leading.

Based on the Prophet's (ﷺ) command to pray as he prayed, the hadiths on bid'a, other hadiths and the understanding of the Salaf, actions of Salah have to be taken from the Prophet (ﷺ). Since the permissibility of women's Imamate of men is not proven, women's Imamate is not allowed. Otherwise A'isha would not have prayed behind a male slave who had not memorised the Qur'an yet he prayed with a mushaf and she would have communicated the practice to the Ummah.¹⁵

This discussion shows the wisdom of al-Awza'i who said: "The one who takes the odd opinions of the scholars leaves Islam." Muslims should follow a principled and consistent approach when picking opinions from Muslim scholars.

3) Scholarship

The authentic hadith says "Scholars are the inheritors of the prophets." ¹⁶ What is interesting to note is that it doesn't call laymen inheritors or the academics inheritors. Instead it is the qualified Islamic scholars that are meant. In the Hadith of Bukhari, the Prophet (ﷺ) said "Allah does not take away knowledge by plucking it out of the hearts of people, but he takes it away by taking the souls of the `ulama until, when he doesn't leave a single `alim, people take ignorant people as their leaders (ittakhadha al-nasa ru'usan juhhalan), who give fatwa and lead people astray without knowledge." ¹⁷

By Brown writing on complex Islamic matters, attacking scholars, scholarship and trying to give his own agendas and views, Brown is opposing the above hadiths and affectively telling people "follow me, a non-scholar, instead of the scholars". Brown is not accepted by the scholarly community as a scholar nor is authorised as a scholar.

Interestingly Brown quotes (page 223) the maxim "we have been commanded to speak to people according to their minds' abilities" and a related hadith.

However he doesn't apply the above rule or hadith to his writings, which will confuse many laymen who aren't trained in the Islamic sciences and can't detect his various misquotes. This is because he quotes the oddest opinions from various sects inside and outside Islam (such as Amina Wadud, Sidqi, Qutb, Abu Rayya, the Mu'tazila, the Shia) without consistently giving a fair or proper refutation.

Neither did the Prophet (ﷺ) nor the sahaba teach people odd/misguided opinions without refuting them. By opposing them in this, Brown has and will lead to the misguidance of other lay Muslims who don't all have the skills to research the topic, critically analyse various claims and to distinguish

¹⁴ Futuhat al-Makkiyya, 1:435 of the Bulaq edition

¹⁵ Al-Muwatta of Malik

¹⁶ Related by Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud, Nasa'i, Ibn Maja, Ahmad, Ibn Hibban, and others. Ibn al-Mulaqqin, Zayla'i, Ibn Hajar, and others seemed it authentic.

¹⁷ Sahih Bukhari, Kitab al-Ilm

between truth and falsehood. Muslims may also get the impression that this is not a divinely protected religion due to the many differences and sects, or that any opinion can be followed.

By seeing the amount of variant views and sects that Brown mentions, one questions what is the intention of writing the book which is for the laymen (Muslims and non-Muslims) and sold in major bookstores? Ahmed ibn Hanbal prohibited kalam because it would lead to laymen being exposed to the arguments of the misguided¹⁸.

The saying of the Salaf is "Indeed this knowledge is religion, so look from whom you take your religion." One should thus take knowledge from the qualified scholars who have the relevant ijazahs going to the Prophet in an unbroken chain, on that subject. The authentic hadith of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) states: "From every succeeding generation its upright folk shall carry this knowledge in turn. They shall repeal from it the distortions of the extremists (tahrif al-ghalin), the (mis)interpretations of the ignorant (ta'wil al-jahilin), and the pretenses of the liars (intihal al-mubtilin)." ¹⁹ and another mass-transmitted (mutawatir) hadith states "There shall not cease to be a group in my Community who shall overcome and stand for truth until the end of time." This shows that the true Islam will be present in every generation (i.e. unbroken chain/isnad) and victorious. This condition only applies to the four Sunni madhabs, who are the rightly guided, which means that odd opinions found amongst other sects (whether new or those extinct) are to be rejected.

Thus Ibn Rajab said "We have already alerted you to the reason for preventing this, which is that the schools of other than these [four] were not widely diffused, nor fully codified. At times views are ascribed to them which they never said, or their pronouncements are understood in ways they never intended. There is no [expert in] these schools to defend them or point out where such slips and errors lie – contrary to the case of the well-known madhabs."²⁰

By ignoring the wisdom of following scholars and non-scholars not speaking about complex Islamic matters to the public, the errors and consequences of Brown's works become apparent. This is also shown by his use of offensive language when describing Islamic sciences such as referring to hadith science with the words "cult of authenticity" (p 224).

The distinguishing mark between a true Hadith scholar and an academic is that for the former, the Prophet (ﷺ) is a living example to be followed in terms of his teachings and actions. This is why they are carefully not to be stingy in regards to the Prophet (ﷺ) and don't neglect to send salutations (salawat) upon him, when his name is written. However the trademark of the modern academic is to neglect this salawat in the name of materialism (whether it is costs of pages or the blatantly false argument that attaching "ﷺ" will distract the flow) and to address the Prophet (ﷺ) as if the Prophet (ﷺ) is the academic's student. You will see the modern academics address their professors with greater respect and titles. This book mentions the name of the Prophet (ﷺ) more than 450 times, yet salawat were only written twice. 100s of times it mentions the Prophet (ﷺ) solely with his name, in contradiction to the Qur'an "Make not the calling of the messenger among you as your calling one of another..." (24:63), about which Sayyiduna Ibn 'Abbas said: "They used to

¹⁸ For more on this topic of kalam, see Ghazali's Qawa'id al-Aqa'id

¹⁹ This hadith is narrated by at least 10 sahaba in various hadith collections such as Tabarani, Bayhaqi, Ibn Hibban and is analysed by Dr GF Haddad in Sunna Notes volume 1, pages 60-62. It is sahih per Imam Ahmed etc

²⁰ Al-Radd 'ala man Ittaba'ah Ghayra'l-Madhahib al-Arba'ah (Makkah: Dar al-'Alam al-Fuwa'id, 1997), 33-4 from <https://thehumblei.com/2012/10/01/legitimate-islamic-learning-unbroken-chains/>

say, 'O Muhammed (ﷺ), ' or 'O Abu Al-Qasim,' but Allah forbade them to do that, as a sign of respect towards His Prophet, and told them to say, 'O Prophet of Allah,' 'O Messenger of Allah.'"²¹

4) Authenticity of hadiths

Brown declares that mutawatir are only "at most a few dozen massively transmitted" (p 232) despite there being over 300 as compiled by the hadith master Ja'far al-Kattani²².

On sahih ahad (i.e. non-mutawatir) hadiths, Brown said they were "only 'most probably' the words of the Prophet" (p 232). The Ahlus Sunnah however believe that it is obligatory to believe²³ in sahih hadiths and al-Qari narrated the consensus of the sahaba on this (as also known by the fact that often the Prophet would only send one or a few sahaba to transmit the Qur'an to other tribes, who would be obligated to believe in it).

Brown has wrongly conveyed the views of scholars about ahad hadiths and epistemology. The scholars either hold them to give absolute certain knowledge (yaqin, as was the view of Ibn Qayyim) or the compelling assumption of truth (al-dhann al-ghalib, as was the view of most Ash'aris). The latter is of various degrees and Ibn Hajar labelled the highest form of it as "iron-clad inductive knowledge".

The crucial point to bear in mind is that Islam requires four witnesses (i.e. ahad reports) for the hadd of zina. Thus sahih ahad reports give enough knowledge that they can be used in criminal law and capital punishments.

5) Rants against karamat

The belief in the possibility of karamat is a belief of the Ahlus Sunnah as stated in the Aqidah Tahawiyya and even by Ibn Taymiyya²⁴, who mentioned that they will continue until the Day of Judgement.

Brown compares the miracles related to the Awliya (karamat) to myths mentioned amongst other religions (p 71-72). The absurdity of such a comparison is known by the fact that karamat should be verified through proper isnads whereas the previous religions did not do that.

He compares the stories of karamat to "noble lies", quotes Buti's mention of fabricated karamat stories about his father (p 261), rants against kashf authentication of hadiths and waking visions of the Prophet (p 226-227). This is despite the fact the Qur'an mentions karamat stories (e.g. Maryam, the man with the throne of Bilqis etc) and various authentic karamat are narrated from the sahaba and Salaf. That, combined with the people converting to Islam due to karamat, the need to disprove materialism and to strengthen the Iman of Muslims, are sufficient benefits in narrating authentic karamat stories.

²¹ Tafsir Ibn Kathir on 24:63,

²² In Nazm al-Mutanathir min al-Hadith al-Mutawatir, al-Alim al-Rabbani, by al-Sayyid Muhammed Jafar al-Idrisi al-Kattani (d. 1927)

²³ Note that if there is proof of abrogation or other reasonable reasons given by the classical scholars, then the hadith is not acted upon

²⁴ As stated in his Aqidah Wasitiyya

وَمِنْ أَصُولِ أَهْلِ السُّنَّةِ: النَّصْبِيُّ بِكَرَامَاتِ الْأَوْلِيَاءِ وَمَا يُجْرِي اللَّهُ عَلَى أَيْدِيهِمْ مِنْ خَوَارِقِ الْعَادَاتِ فِي أَنْوَاعِ الْعُلُومِ وَالْمَكَاشِفَاتِ وَأَنْوَاعِ الْقُدْرَةِ وَالْثَّائِبَاتِ، وَالْمَأْثُورِ عَنْ سَالِفِ الْأُمَمِ فِي سُورَةِ الْكَهْفِ وَغَيْرِهَا، وَعَنْ صَدْرِ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ مِنَ الصَّحَابَةِ وَالتَّابِعِينَ وَسَائِرِ فِرَقِ الْأُمَّةِ، وَهِيَ مُوجُودَةٌ فِيهَا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ -

Whilst it is true that many karamat stories are forged, many are also authentic when looked through the eye of isnad. That is one reason why Tahawi mentioned “We believe in what we know of Karamat, the marvels of the awliya' and in authentic stories about them from trustworthy sources. “ Such is the case with many karamat reported by Ibn Ata Illah about his teacher²⁵ and by al-Lamati about his teacher²⁶.

No less a scholar than the hadith master al-Suyuti (who memorised over 200,000 hadiths) deduces the permissibility of waking visions of the Prophet based on the authentic hadith “Whoever saw me in his dream shall see me with his waking eyes and the devil cannot impersonate me”²⁷. The hadith mentions no qualifications or restrictions about it being in the hereafter and the like. Suyuti also narrates an actual story of hadith authentication via kashf while Abd al-Aziz al-Dabbagh authenticated many hadiths through his kashf (despite him being illiterate, his gradings were confirmed by various hadith masters when analysing the isnad²⁸) and Shah Waliullah Dihlawi discussed his father seeing the Prophet in a waking state²⁹.

6) Attack on Syed Naquib al-Attas

Brown accuses the famous Muslim philosopher al-Attas of “noble lying” (like the Buddhists and Greeks (p 218 – 221)) against the Prophet (ﷺ) when he quoted a saying attributed to the Prophet (ﷺ) from a book that “People are asleep, and when they die they awaken”. It is correct that this saying was actually said by Sayyiduna Ali (RA) and when a questioner challenged al-Attas, the latter said “Why should we not use this, when it is an important principle (asl) in our religion?”. Brown misinterpreted this to mean that al-Attas believed it is correct to attribute the hadith to the Prophet and thereby engage in a noble lie.

However what al-Attas meant is that “the statement is true, regardless of who said it” and not that the questioner was wrong. In fact, Ibn Arabi, about whom Brown said “was no lackluster jurist and Hadith scholar” (p 190) and “declared him-self able to verify Hadiths that had no chains of transmission whatsoever on the basis of 'unveiling (kashf)'” (p 226) attributed this hadith to the Prophet (ﷺ)³⁰

The hadith on respecting elders is pertinent here. Despite the above accusations, Brown includes a picture of himself with al-Attas in the book.

7) Weak hadiths

In his chapter on “Lying about the Prophet of God”, Brown attacks the scholarly use of weak hadiths for admonitions and likens it to the Greek use of noble lies and Hollywood, even if the likes of Ahmad, Shawkani, Ibn Hajar, Bukhari and Ibn Taymiyya allowed it and the conditions were met (such as not being a forgery or very weak, using uncertain phrasing e.g. “It is said”, not being for law or aqidah, and falling under an established principle).

Since isnad was not the methodology of the Greeks but even weak hadiths quoted by scholars have isnads, the analogy is false. As weak hadiths should not have a liar in its chain and aren't clearly false,

²⁵ See the Lata'if al-Minan by Ibn Ata Illah where the miracles of his teacher Abul Abbas al-Mursi are reported

²⁶ See the Ibriz by al-Lamati where the miracles of his teacher Abd al-Aziz al-Dabbagh are reported

²⁷ Narrated by Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud and others from the Prophet

²⁸ See many instances in the Ibriz by his close student al-Lamati

²⁹ See his Anfas al-Arifin

³⁰ As mentioned by William Chittick in The Sufi Path of Knowledge, page 120, referring to Futuhat al-Makkiyya by Ibn Arabi in the chapter on dreams.

it cannot be said that the Prophet (ﷺ) didn't say them. They could be true (it has a 50% chance per Hamza Yusuf) and can be used to encourage good actions if there is no harm. Respect for the Prophet (ﷺ) means that we should consider things that he might have plausibly said. As Dr Gibril Haddad mentioned "The difference is clear between saying we are not forced to use weak narrators and saying that one cannot transmit anything from them"³¹

Despite his rant against weak hadiths, he accepts the weak hadith of Umm Waraqah for law.

8) Hadiths and reason

Brown devotes 4 paragraphs (pages 69-70) for the view that deems the authentic hadith about a fly to be scientifically impossible and against reason. He then devotes a few lines in the middle of another paragraph (page 70) with a counter argument from Sunni scholars. This gives laymen readers the impression that "this authentic hadith is against reason and can be rejected".

This theme of how much space is given to both sides of the argument is either an indication of bias or recklessness. He also did not quote the many scientific studies done (by Muslims and non-Muslims) that prove that the hadith is true³² although he briefly mentioned that flies had antibodies.

9) Translating the Qur'an

Brown translates the Qur'an such as by saying "The power [yad] of Abu Lahab will perish" (p 91). However I couldn't find yad meaning power in any of the linguistic tafsirs so it appears to be a ta'wil without any basis.

10) Interest/usury (riba)

Brown puts a fog over the ijma/consensus (per both the Sunnis and Shias) on the prohibition of riba by stating that the Qur'an forbids "excessive usury" (pages 30 and 111). Nowhere in the Qur'an is the word "excessive" mentioned in addition to riba e.g it says "Allah has permitted trade and has forbidden riba" (2:275). Although Brown earlier stated that the Qur'an forbids riba ("any kind of interest-bearing transaction"), by adding the mention of "excessive" later on, obscures the clear cut Qur'anic prohibition.

Brown makes a mockery of the scholars that quote the hadith comparing riba to interest as clearly false because apparently incest is worse than riba. However this reasoning is clearly disproved because Allah Most High says ""O those who believe, fear Allah and give up what still remains of the riba if you are believers. But if you do not, then listen to the declaration of war from Allah and His Messenger. And if you repent, yours is your principal. Neither you wrong, nor be wronged." (2:278-279)". Riba is thus such a grave sin that Allah declares war against it, whilst I am not aware that he says the same about incest in the Qur'an.

Perhaps Brown can be excused about the ramifications of riba because he is not qualified in economics or finance. Riba is a method of economic oppression and enslavement that has caused large populations to be economically enslaved, led to financial crises, lost homes etc.

³¹ Sunna Notes volume 1, page 103. That chapter shows that the vast majority of hadith scholars allowed the narration of weak hadiths for other than law and aqidah.

³² Such as "Microbiological Studies on Fly Wings" by Rehab Atta, World Journal of Medical Sciences 11 (4): 486-489, 2014 or the article by Dr Gibril Haddad <http://seekershub.org/ans-blog/2011/07/02/does-modern-science-confirm-the-hadith-that-says-there-is-an-antidote-in-the-wing-of-a-fly/>

Brown also claims about the hadith that it is “widely considered unreliable or even a blatant forgery by Muslim Hadith scholars”. However this has been narrated by 7 different sahaba with their collectivity giving it strength and making forgery implausible. Certain scholars also declared some of the chains authentic, leading to the overall hadith being authentic in meaning.³³

Brown later quotes strange opinions from colonial and post-colonial scholars permitting interest, such as on the reasoning that fiat money has no value. This opinion contradicts economics and finance and is an embarrassment to the people. It also contradicts the well known hadith “A time will certainly come to mankind when no one will remain except the consumer of riba (usury/interest), and if he does not consume it, some of its vapour will reach him”. Ibn Isa said: Some of its dust will reach him” (Abu Dawud). How can there be riba affecting everyone if the bank interest is not interest? It is however interesting to note that the fatwas on the permissibility of interest primarily started during the colonial times.

In conclusion, the celebrity status given to Brown by Muslim laymen and their acting as if he has a status equal to the four Sunni mujtahids is unhealthy. Although I have not highlighted the many other errors in the book, this review highlights some of the major and basic errors in the work and the need for only qualified Muslim scholars to write about such complex and important Islam topics, rather than unqualified academics such as Brown. For good scholarship by hadith scholars in English, one is recommended to read the works of Mustafa A'zami and Gibril Haddad instead of the works of Jonathan Brown (unless one is classically trained in the Islamic sciences).

³³ Targhib of Mundhiri, volume 3, pages 6-8.